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FUNERAL ORATION

FOR

LOUIS XVI.

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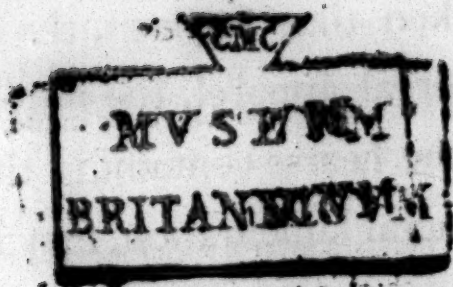
Woe to the hands that shed this costly blood !
A curse shall light upon the limbs of men ;
Domestic fury, and fierce civil strife,
Shall cumber all the parts of Gallia's land ;
Blood and destruction shall be so in use,
And dreadful objects so familiar,
That mothers shall but smile, when they behold
Their infants quarter'd with the hands of war :
All pity choak'd with custom of fell deeds.

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FUNERAL ORATION, &c.

WHEN, in the common course of things, the unrelenting hand of death has removed from this world some illustrious character, whose private virtues and public services claim of justice to be recorded ; in order to fix the multitude in attention, and awaken their feelings, the awful solemnity of the place, the funereal apparel, the note of pathetic harmony, together with the hearse containing the object of regret, and cause of the general lamentation, may be found serviceable to prepare the human mind for those useful reflections which he would wish to excite, who, moralizing on the dead, directs the wholesome stream of philosophy and religion towards the living.

On the present sad occasion, such adventitious circumstances, even on the spot, were not attainable ; nor will they, I conceive, be wanted to strike the rock, and give the flood of generous and universal pity to flow over every civilized region of the globe. Alas ! no such funeral honours could be paid to the corse of the unhappy monarch, whose sufferings I am about

to relate. The same savage and ferocious hands, that dragged him to an ignominious death, hid his mangled remains in an ignominious grave. The enemies of the great founder of our religion gave his body to the pious request of a humane stranger for interment; and Joseph of Arimathea took him down from the cross, and wrapped him in linen, and laid him in a sepulchre. The cruelty of modern times pursues, beyond the stroke of death, imitative meekness and emulative innocence. The inhabitants of the new discovered islands, in primeval savageness, kill and devour the intruders on their soil, the disturbers of their repose. The refined inhabitant of France suffers education, learning, riches, commerce, and luxury, to bend and soften every thing, excepting the adamantine covering of the human heart. To *that*, steeled in more than primeval and savage hardness, the voice of compassion pleads in vain: from *that*, reason and policy retire unheard: for *there* violence, inhumanity, capriciousness, and folly, maintain undisturbed dominion.

I am now to call your attention to one of the most lamentable events that ever occurred to disgrace the annals of a nation;—the cold and deliberate murder of a king; adjudged to death by his accusers; convicted of no positive crime, and tried under no promulgated law; called to answer before those who had but the other day sworn allegiance

to him; a sacrifice to no pretended necessity, and averting no impending national danger by his blood.

In this country, we witnessed an example of unrelenting severity; a king terminating his life under the hands of the executioner. But how great the difference, and how wide the distinction, between the cases of the two unfortunate princes! The one contending for powers which a free constitution must expire under, or resist; the other, not struggling for the maintenance of authorities or prerogatives, of which liberty, wisdom, and moderation, demanded an abridgment. The one resorting to arms, in support of pretensions which he conceived to be righteous; the other, conceding every thing, and even putting himself, naked and defenceless, into the hands of his enemies, lest the standard of civil war should be unfurled for the safety of his person, and his dominion be deluged with the blood of his ungrateful people. Strange, and unparalleled in the history of the world, that conduct so opposite should lead to the same miserable end!

That disorder and abuse had so gathered on the government of France, as much to deform its shape and impede its operations, is easy to be admitted: that the chain of strength and independance, which, in Britain, reaches from the peasant to the monarch, through the wise gradations of yeo-

manry, manufacturers, gentlemen, and nobility, was there unknown, is an undeniable truth: that this chain of connection, joining every being that breathes the free atmosphere of England in one common interest, communicating to the whole mass and body of the people the electric fire of energy, emulation, and courage; that places no object of laudable pursuit in life beyond the possible attainment of ability, industry, and perseverance, was in that country not to be perceived. True it is, that the old government had many imperfections; and that some weeds rose with rankness and obscenity round the tribunals of its justice, and the altars of its religious worship; but these are not, in equity or in truth, ascribable to the error or to the design of this unhappy monarch. If the governing system was faulty, it was an inheritance of defects to which he was called. Severity itself could not have exacted the unreasonable expectation, that from him should have proceeded the spontaneous effort, and Herculean labour, of removing the foul accumulations of so many reigns; and calumny has not dared to insinuate that he was ever found interrupting the hand that would have eradicated these mischiefs; or that he obstructed those labours, which, tending to the diminution of his own privileges and prerogatives, added to the scale of the general happiness, and to the increasing bulk of public freedom.

He was called a tyrant : but his reign was a series of uninterrupted concession. He built to himself no mound, to resist the wave impelling wave that gained upon the shore of monarchical rule. Happy indeed had it been for France, had she, in her wisdom and moderation, known where to have controlled the inundation, and, for her own security, to have placed the citadel of her king upon a rock, beyond the licentious insults of the spray, or the ruinous encroachments of the ocean.

He was called a tyrant ; and yet would himself have worked at the construction of a fabric, modelled after the best, the British constitution, the nearest to perfection that ever imperfect beings enjoyed : and easily might such a building have arisen on the ruins of the ancient system, had the nobility and the church, in their justice, or their sense of danger, seen with the monarch the necessity of ample concession ; not offering, like some, every thing to purchase a fleeting popularity, nor with others, refusing every thing with unbending stubbornness. Then, indeed, might the nations of the world have stood amazed in anxious suspense, watching whether this enormous power, finding, for the first time, the use of all those glorious gifts of the Creator, of climate, soil, population, rivers, and seas, would have retained her former insufferable lust of dominion, and continued to

envy and grasp after the little enjoyed by other countries : or whether, satiated with abundance, and reaping the blessing of content from a graver and a purer philosophy than has issued from the porticoes of her novelists and romance writers, she would have dealt out peace, happiness, and security, to the neighbouring nations which surrounded her.

Were it generous to endeavour to heighten and aggravate the melancholy scenes which France has so lately exhibited, to the shame and dismay of Europe ; were not the cup of her calamity at this moment overflowing, how might her miseries be increased, by bringing back to the mind the dispersion of that golden vision which floated in the imagination not only of every sincere patriot of France, but of every lover of humanity and public freedom, when this king, this tyrant, flung open the doors of his palace, and invited his people about him, to assist in the great and divine work of ameliorating their condition, and improving the constitution of their country. But this dream is at an end ; and it were cruelty to recall it to those banished and unhappy wanderers who now crowd the shores of foreign countries, expelled from their own for their attachment to their sovereign, their religion, and their God. No sorrow is so sharp as that which stings with the recollection of error and misconduct ; and some there may be, among these unfortunate men, who

may have assisted in loosening the fetters of anarchy and licentiousness, under the fatal mistake, that these fiends when liberated would obey their voices, and return at their command to their prison houses.

It cannot be within the compass of this address, to go up to the source of all the circumstances which conduced to the overthrowing of ranks and orders in the state, the demolition of the monarchy, and the casting out of religion and the worship of God. Their progress has fallen within the compass of our own observation, and the detail would in this place be impertinent. How soon the powers of regulation and intentional amendment were torn from the hands of those who entertained the hope of sober reform ; how soon plants of the most poisonous quality sprung from a soil that seemed prepared for more useful vegetation ; remains a melancholy task for the historian of these times ; and a sad tissue of guilt and folly has he to hold up to the doubting eyes of posterity.

It is to the consideration of the calamities and undeserved fate of Louis the Sixteenth, I demand your particular attention.

If I am to mark the commencement of his afflictions, I must take the period when he first beheld his expectations blasted, his endeavours to promote the happiness of his people frus-

trated, and when, instead of his invited guests, order, peace, and security, he saw rush into his hall the furies of anarchy, discord, and contention. Then indeed he began to taste the bitter draught of disappointment, and then commenced those sufferings which pursued him, through different gradations of misery, to the grave.

Depressed by the failure of all his projects for relieving and satisfying his people, and seeing that, by his acquiescence and resignation, he was only levelling the road for desperate ambition, irreconcilable hatred, and inveterate malice, to march with a prouder and a securer step; under the consternation (too strong for human nature to resist) at perceiving the blackest arts employed to poison the minds of his subjects, to rouse them into madness, to inspire them with an appetite for murder and human blood, to marshal them into rank and file of assassins, holding out to their fury all the moderate men of France, as proper objects of extermination, but particularly those who maintained any fidelity or attachment to his person; we must thus figure to ourselves the condition of this persecuted king, when he was besieged by a savage rabble in his palace of Versailles, and afterwards borne away in captivity to Paris.

We must also represent to ourselves the condition of his unfortunate queen, nursed in the lap of royal ease and splen-

dour, whose hours had till lately danced with down upon their feet, in the same tremendous night suddenly roused from her slumber by the yellings of desperate vengeance, the screams of pain, the discharge of fire-arms, the breaking down of the doors of the royal apartments; the groans of death re-echoing from all the courts and passages of the palace; a moment only given her to escape from her chamber to that of her husband, in the dreadful incertitude of finding him alive, still able to afford protection to herself and family, or sinking under the knife of the assassin, and mixing his blood with that of his children!—Gracious heaven! am I to lament that the mercy of death was then denied him?—whether from cowardice, mistaken orders, or refinement of cruelty, as yet has not been ascertained.

But his hour was not then come: for she found him surrounded by his servants, and his children clinging to him for safety; himself standing in the midst of them, like Troy's devoted monarch, with resignation and calmness expecting his fate. But no Pyrrhus at that time appeared, who had either the humanity or the courage to save the nation of France from the indelible stain of cold, useless, and premeditated murder.

After submitting to the ignominy of pleading for the lives of the remainder of his guards who had not that night

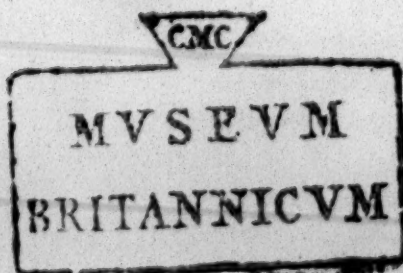
perished in his defence, he obeyed the order of the rabble, left his palace forever, and the regicide triumph (for death headed that procession) bore him away to the capital. On the road, nothing was left untried to destroy manly fortitude, or to shake the weaker frame of female softness and sensibility. The most atrocious and indecent expressions, the most horrid imprecations and barbarous threats rent the air from Versailles to Paris. Women, acting the parts of the most frantic priestesses of Bacchus, but with more tremendous orgies, surrounded the royal carriage ; and, instead of the vase, the chaplet of the rose and the vine, came steeped in gore, and decorated with garlands of human intestines !

On entering the palace of the Tuilleries, the door of his freedom closed upon him forever. Though, perhaps, this house had not its chains and its dungeons, nor other scenery of a prison, yet his solitary walk in his garden was restricted to a certain and early hour ; exercise, from habit necessary to his health, was denied him, and he was condemned still to act the solemn farce of majesty, at the bidding of those who by this time had usurped the government of the country. In this condition he remained till an occasion offered itself favourable for his regaining, what every creature in this country would have wished him to regain,—his liberty. The

attempt however failed. Various causes were assigned for that failure, and various suspicions rose upon the circumstances which defeated it.

Whatever advantage was afforded to his enemies by this natural effort to free himself from so unjust a confinement, remained with them but for a moment; for the offer, on the part of the people, of the crown, on his subscribing to the terms of the constitution, immediately followed; and which of necessity either did away all pretended charge of anterior known offence, or we must admit the gross absurdity, on the part of the people, that they spontaneously sought the rule of a detected criminal and approved tyrant. From September, 1791, therefore, we must suppose his guilt commenced; or that there was a clear detection, upon substantial proof, of former criminality. Every cool and dispassionate reader of that strange proceeding, his trial, is able to decide this question.

It is observable that, so late as the July of the following year, a fresh proof of the confidence which the nation continued to repose in the monarch of their *free choice* and *deliberate will*, was evinced by the renewal of the oath of fidelity to him. Well impowered to observe and watch his conduct, (for he was still a prisoner; still the boundaries of his captivity were not extended) the people give him this



additional testimony of their loyalty and attachment: but, strange to relate, in a short space afterwards, the populace had become so tutored into disaffection, that, without alleging any specific charge of misrule, or infraction on his part of the compact so lately entered into, the mayor of Paris is deputed to carry to the bar of the Convention the arrogant and perfidious resolution of the Sections, no longer to recognize Louis the Sixteenth for their king.

The arrival of an armed banditti from the south, still more practised in murder and inured to blood than even the rabble of the metropolis, and invited as pioneers to hew their way up to the throne, through every obstacle that justice, humanity, or religion, feebly opposed to them, brings us to the contemplation of those horrors which immediately succeeded.

With a trembling hand I draw aside the veil that opens to our view these terrible transactions. Upon this bloody threshold, human nature trembles to advance. The same inscription, which the poet read on the outward gate of Hell, seems here again engraved, to drive away the visitor of these detestable abodes of horror and of blood:

“ Per me si va nella città dolente ;
 Per me si va nell’ eterno dolore ;
 Per me si va tra la perdute gente.”*

* Dante, Canto III.

Through these dreadful scenes, and this disgusting recital of improved barbarity, I shall hurry with all possible dispatch. The present age requires no further information on this sad subject ; the milk of human softness, I fear, insensibly dries up as these horrors become familiar ; and I trust that posterity, from an acquaintance with better times, will reject as fiction the detail which unbiassed truth must shudder to transmit.

The description of this last attack upon his inoffensive repose, will only appear a repetition, perhaps an exaggeration, of the terrific scenes he had already witnessed. The last was only marked with this distinction : more of his defenders fell in his defence ; a larger stream of blood stained the capacious building he inhabited ; helpless women, and even children, were added to the stouter and more obvious victims of loyalty, and of conscientious duty to their sovereign ; and, what remains difficult to understand, whilst cruelty seemed most unrestrained, and wanton in its sport, assassination did not a moment forget the cold mandate of orderly proscription. The work of death was regular ; though, like the eccentric march of a comet, seemingly licentious and ungovernable, yet in reality taking its departure, and returning, under given laws of systematic murder.

Finding his palace stormed, and that the bodies of his slaughtered guard formed no longer a bulwark of defence, the king quickly adopted the resolution of suing for protection to the sitting Assembly, and, at the risk of life, arrived at the bar to implore it for himself and family. The request came too suddenly for the most prudential wickedness to be prepared to resist: a sanctuary was granted to his prayer; and, incredible as it may seem, it was not violated. His escape appeared supernatural to all, but particularly to those whose black designs were for a moment frustrated. He entered like a ghost of the dead amongst them. For a moment, I repeat it, the projects of his merciless persecutors seemed disconcerted; who, missing the principal object, almost repented the useless effusion of so much human blood. But, soon recollecting themselves, they resumed their cowardly triumph in the deaths of the many brave and faithful men who perished that day by the side of their king; and were not displeased to find that the lamb had run for shelter in to the den of the lion, and that the dove had flown for safety into the eagle's nest.

After a detention of three days in the apartment contiguous to the Assembly, he, with the queen, and their children, was removed to the Temple. If his condition, for this short period

was somewhat softened, by still being permitted to behold the faces of some of his faithful attendants, that little comfort was not with-held.

I shall not invite you to explore the dismal recesses of his prisons; but shall briefly remark, with what patient fortitude he endured an interval of suspense the most awful and irreconcilable to the strongest mind; and that all the indignities which low malice, invested with authority, exercised against him, only taught him to recollect to how much greater humiliation the Saviour of the world had submitted without a murmur. What dungeon but has witnessed the agonies of husbands and of fathers, struggling in the last embraces of wives and children? The condition of royalty can add nothing to such extremes of human misery. Nay, it is even possible that this exalted station, not always depending for happiness on such domestic props as are required to cheer and sustain common life, may be spared a pang in such tremendous moments. But alas! it was reserved for Louis the Sixteenth alone, when pursued to death as a king, to be exempt from no suffering of a private man. No ceremonious observance of address and approach had ever secluded him from the society of his family. The guide of youthful innocence, the paternal teacher of science and religion, fled with the expiring breath of the monarch; and the first separation of

the husband from the wife, was that which severed them in this world for ever.

Wherefore should we dwell upon the cruel mockery of his trial. Prejudged and condemned before he was dragged to the bar of that tribunal which sentenced him to death, he seemed only produced to shew, that equity and justice were not to be suffered to fade away, and sink in silence and oblivion, but that their downfall should be manifest, avowed, and public; and that by this murder, all fear of their return should be removed from those so much interested in their extinction.

Here might one pause, and raise a hope that human depravity, having advanced so far in the demolition of all order, rule, social happiness, and security, in the overthrow of all morality and religion, in the shameless practice of every art that can corrupt and debase the public mind; and depending upon plunder, proscription, terror, and slaughter, for the execution of all its projects, had, by this last atrocious deed, reached that point from whence it could not rise, but must of necessity return. Alas! like a journey through a mountainous country, high as the hill may be which we have ascended, another still towers above it: if we labour to the summit of *that*, another and another rise before us. When we imagine that, in viewing these horrors, we have been carried up to the

utmost pinnacle of human guilt and corruption, another mountain of superior wickedness unexpectedly starts up to astonish and to terrify.

It only remains to observe, that in his last moments he behaved with modest firmness, and philosophical resignation. Religion had put a staff into his hands, and it did not bend beneath his weight. Peace to his manes! His sufferings are at an end. He hears no more the cries of his faithful domestics; he views no longer the inevitable destruction of his children in their innocence and their virtues. The horrid picture is no longer before him, that, in his daily vision and nightly dream, shewed the partner of his bed and of his throne, cast to the female furies of the streets; and her limbs strewn about that city, of which the other day she was both the ornament and the pride. To have known that she was to meet with comparatively a mild termination of her sorrows; that human nature was not to be outraged by brutal indignities offered to her person; and that the stroke of death would be swift and complete; might have somewhat abated those apprehensions which pursued him to the hour when fear and misery sink for ever. But this, even this, was denied him.

I must now dismiss this melancholy subject; but not without exhorting an English audience, to turn their eyes to

their own condition, and to profit by the example of the calamities which I have been detailing. The commiseration of Britons may be ample and sincere, though they derive from such errors and such guilt a cautionary light, to mark the rocks on which this neighbouring nation has been shipwrecked. They may behold the miserable consequences of hasty and violent innovation. They may see what hands seize on power, when integrity and moderation are obliged to stop, and refuse to follow when presumptuous vice takes the lead. They may witness the wretched policy of attempting to bring every thing to the touchstone of theoretic perfection. Sitting under the shelter of their own free and happy constitution, which has covered them and their ancestors with so broad a shade, they will not patiently suffer the petulance of conceit to mutilate its boughs, under the specious pretence of improvement ; and much less the desperate hand of ambition to be busy with its roots.

THE END.



